

STAFF REPORT TO COUNCIL

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DATE: April 25, 2024

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

SUBJECT: Wildflower Boulevard Planting

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated April 25, 2024 from the Director of Civic Operations, titled "Wildflower Boulevard Planting".

PURPOSE:

To provide Council with information on the planting of wildflowers within a City roadway median or boulevard.

BACKGROUND:

At the January 23, 2024, budget meeting, Council directed administration to return a report that would consider wildflower planting in municipal boulevards.

There is a growing trend towards diversifying plantings within urban landscapes that allow for biodiversity, increased habitat for pollinators while improving visual aesthetics. This process is commonly referred to as *naturalization* and involves the strategy of establishing native landscapes in select areas using minimum maintenance practices. Typical areas include woodlands, wetlands and meadow like landscapes. Depending on weather and temperature, wildflowers can bloom within 2-3 weeks and may last as long as 3-4 months.

DISCUSSION:

Administration has reviewed internal requirements for wildflower planting. To provide context, the center median along Massey Drive from Ospika Boulevard to the Foot/Coyle Street intersection has been identified as an example for a naturalized planting area. (See Figure 1. below.) The existing median is grass, and this portion of Massey Drive serves as an access point to residential neighbourhoods and the greenspace at the end of the roadway. The median is also maintained with the standard mobile mowing practice.

This portion of Massey Drive is classified as a collector road. A collector road is a low-to-moderate-capacity road which serves to move traffic from local streets to arterial roads. The proposed median area contains approximately 1070 square meters of grassed turf and 7 ornamental trees. The median turf maintenance includes mowing and litter collection on a cycle of once every 2 weeks at a cost of \$450 per season. This is a typical level of service for this type of roadway and median that begins in mid-April to the end of September.

To convert a center median to wildflowers would require excavation and removal of the existing grass turf, adding topsoil and seeding with the appropriate wildflower mix. The approximate cost of this conversion would be in the approximate range of \$21,000 to \$24,000

The maintenance of the wildflower median would be more extensive than the current grass turf. It would include weeding twice per season to prevent invasive species from propagating. With the current mowing schedule, invasive species are generally kept at bay but would likely infiltrate naturalized wildflower plots. As this median is not irrigated, watering would be required during the seed germination window and throughout the growing season. In times of water conservation, watering reductions may be necessary.

As the growing season progresses, clear sight lines are an important safety consideration. Additional trimming may be required to ensure sight lines are maintained. In addition to weeding and sight line restoration, a cutback and clean up of the median would be required in the fall. As per safe work procedures when working on or adjacent to a roadway, traffic control measures would be required to ensure safety of staff during maintenance tasks. Currently, turf mowing does not require traffic control. Species selection could reduce the requirement for sight line trimming purposes, but the other maintenance tasks would still be required. Seasonal maintenance tasks and end of season clean up would be at a cost of approximately \$3,000 to \$5,000 per season.

As it relates to stormwater management, wildflowers would likely have a similar absorption rate as the existing grass turf. Maintenance requirements previously identified would also need to ensure that wildflowers are kept in a state as to not impede the flow of stormwater on the existing roadway.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Conversion of an existing grass median to wildflowers supports the myPG Community Goal of Green City, Green Practices through habitat creation and increased biodiversity. Current turf maintenance practices support the myPG goal of Sustainable Infrastructure through cost effective and efficient service delivery.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The table below summarizes current maintenance costs, potential costs to convert the existing grass median (1070 sq meters) to wildflowers and the potential costs to maintain the converted boulevard.

Description	Cost
Annual turf maintenance, current practice	\$450
Conversion of turf to wildflower growing medium (one time) Labour and Equipment	\$21,000 to \$24,000
Seasonal maintenance tasks and end of season clean up (annual) Labour and equipment	\$3,000 to \$5,000

Conversion and seasonal maintenance costs would be borne by the Parks annual operating budget. Subsequent years would necessitate an increase to the operating budget.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

Naturalization of an existing City maintained median or boulevard allows for biodiversity and habitat creation for pollinators. Short term aesthetics would also be improved during the 3-4 months in which the flowers are in bloom. Although it may appear maintenance is reduced with the elimination of grass mowing, weeding, trimming, and watering are required to ensure success of the plantings. Drawbacks could include reduced sight lines and potential migration of invasive plants which are items that need to be recognized.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Blake McIntosh, Director of Civic Operations

PREPARED BY: B. McIntosh

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: 2024/05/06

Figure 1. – Example Location

